Revisiting "Black Downtown": Spatial and Storytelling Practices in Austin, TX

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ANT 679HB
Special Honors in the Department of Anthropology
The University of Texas at Austin

May 2020

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This thesis is dedicated to Lillian Mary Bedford Eppright.

June 4th, 1932 – April 25th, 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Harrison Eppright first and foremost for his willingness to participate in this project. The enthusiasm that he shows towards scholarship and storytelling made the interview and touring process both easy and exciting. I would also like to thank my two readers, Dr. Craig Campbell and Dr. Marina Peterson, for their year-long show of support for my project. Their patience and feedback helped me elevate my writing and push my research further. Many thanks also go to Dr. Campbell for being my supervising professor and my go-to source for the hours of proof-reading necessary for this thesis.

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By

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2020

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Harrison David Eppright, a multi-generational black artist, creates and participates in an everyday performance of culture and visibility through his capacity as a tour guide for the city and an ambassador for Austin's visitor services. Harrison has a unique subjective experience affected by intersecting identities and oppressions, including those along the lines of race and sexuality. I examine how he assigns meaning to places that are fading, getting bulldozed, or enduring. This thesis explores how Harrison utilizes storytelling and walking tours in the shifting landscape of East Austin in order to find pride in "home" while making visible the cultural makeup being threatened by current circumstances such as gentrification and displacement. These neighborhoods in Austin, which were once designed as a "negro district", now face the problem of losing their identity to a host of new development that has led to the pricing-out and displacement of mostly black and brown working-class residents and businesses.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Introduction

Harrison David Eppright, a multi-generational black resident of Austin (or "Austinite") creates and participates in an everyday performance of culture and visibility through his capacity as a tour guide and ambassador for the city's Visitor Services. Since boyhood, Harrison has had fostered a growing passion for history, architecture, and storytelling against the backdrop of Austin, Texas. Today, although no longer a resident, Harrison maintains a connection to the east side of Austin through family, friends, and walking tours of the rich cultural landscape, which features an historical African-American influence.

I take particular interest in that Harrison Eppright has a unique subjective experience affected by intersecting identities and oppressions, including those along the lines of race and sexuality. As a guide and narrator to his audiences, Harrison Eppright weaves personal histories, identity, and intention into a specific "experience" of East Austin. Using a collaborative and multidimensional approach of "walking," "talking," and "being" . I examine how he assigns meaning to places that are fading, getting bulldozed, or enduring. Each of these processes are related to one another and have the ultimate effect shaping how audiences, including both residents and tourists, perceive East Austin.

These neighborhoods in Austin, which were once designated as a "negro district" by the city in 1928, now face the problem of losing their identity to a host of new development that has led to the pricing-out and displacement of mostly black and brown working-class residents and businesses. It is in light of these circumstances that I also

evaluate Harrison Eppright's "walking" of East Austin in terms of its political implications. Overall, this thesis explores how Harrison utilizes storytelling and walking tours in the shifting landscape of East Austin in order to find pride in "home" while making visible the cultural makeup being threatened by current circumstances such as gentrification and displacement.

Chapter 1
Touring in the Context of East Austin

Figure 1: The first of a few tourists I saw stop at the Victory Grill while eating across the street at Blue Dahlia. They did not appear to be on a tour led by anyone, but were biking down E 11th Street on street bikes. A variety of methods are used to tour East Austin: walking, bicycling, pedi-cab service (see Figures 9, 10, 11), and buses are all common.

Credit: Ryan Mata (2020)

In Julia Aoki and Akaya Yoshimizu's multisited ethnography of place situated in Yokohama, Japan and Vancouver, Canada (2015), walking tours are understood to be "a means and method to critically engage the histories that we seek to uncover and the absences we face in our attempts to uncover them…" This definition emphasizes the "uncovering" of histories and how one rationally understands a place by weighing what they observe empirically against qualities that are now "absent." Aoki and Yoshimizu's approach to categorizing a walking tour can be applied to my study of East Austin in particular because of the importance placed on taking into account that which is no longer there—rotten, dilapidated, paved over, or otherwise moved away from the public discourse of the space.

Such is the case in Austin's east side, where walking tours function on behalf of the preservation of the African-American culture embedded within the land itself. Tour guides such as Harrison Eppright can help to make sense of what *is* there while also helping to imagine what is *no longer* there—like a mediator of histories working across temporalities. This becomes particularly meaningful in the context of East Austin, where gentrification has modified the landscape and public display of cultural heritage.

Between the years 2000-2010, Austin experienced major growth that was among the fastest in the nation. Despite a growth rate of 20.4% during this decade, Austin produced a net *decline* in its African-American residents (Tang & Ren 2014) This demonstrates how rising housing costs in Austin disproportionately displaced Austin's predominantly black, working-class residents, who—when priced out of their own neighborhoods—could not afford to relocate elsewhere within Austin. Without a doubt,

gentrification has affected the appearance and population makeup of East Austin and the city as a whole.

Current ways to gain exposure to Austin's black heritage include walking tours that are put on by both the city's Visitor Services as well as organizations such as Six Square (named after the original "six square" miles that were plotted as the "negro district by city officials in 1928). Harrison Eppright gives tours on behalf of both of these entities, and this thesis will seek to understand the unique ways that he enables visibility of Austin's African-American community and its many landmarks. This "visibility" functions politically, as touring Austin's African-American history carries particular meaning with it during times of a statistical drought in the city's growth of the black community. By walking the streets of East Austin, Harrison's tours remind passersby and participants that the landscape, although forever-changing, contains pockets of embedded African-American histories—which can in turn be examined, expounded on, and "remembered" by one tour group at a time.

Chapter 2
Meeting Harrison Eppright

Figure 2: Harrison showing me a tile mosaic installed at the African-American Cultural & Heritage Facility on E 11th Street. He'd taken his coffee from Blue Dahlia on the road, and took sips to help clear his throat every so often while walking the streets. Tucked under his left arm (and out of the frame) is the worn manila envelope containing his notes, which he didn't need to check at all!

Credit: Ryan Mata (2020)

Figure 3: The Blue Dahlia Bistro at lunchtime on Saturday, February 15, 2020. This restaurant took the place of the Dandelion Café in 2007 and has since become a popular brunch destination. Small groups clustered in the front patio area of the restaurant enjoy the fair weather and, as I would soon after find out, the delicious food. Harrison and I would sit at the table on the left side of this picture, just behind the group of women in conversation. It provided a great spot for us view the face of the Victory Grill while chatting over a soft background of jazz and Sinatra.

Credit: Ryan Mata (2020)

Figure 4: Victory Grill (sometimes referred to as "Victory Café") at lunchtime on Saturday, February 15, 2020. In the short time I was here, several groups of tourists, including myself and Harrison, stopped to read from its Historical Site placard. When I took a closer look into the interior, I could see neatly stacked and positioned chairs and tables. Harrison confirmed to me later that there were groups currently using it to meet, and that it would re-open to the public eventually.

Credit: Ryan Mata (2020)

I arrived a few minutes early to my first scheduled lunch meeting and tour with Harrison David Eppright.[1] He called my cellphone while on the way back from his south Austin barber, informing me that he would be running late. From what Harrison tells me later that day, looking his best—while working *or* relaxing—has been important to him for much of his life. A stylish appearance lends to his confident stature as a tour guide and Manager of Visitor Services for the city's tourism bureau, Visit Austin.

"How people see Austin may be based on impressions of you when touring?" I ask.

"Exactly. And certainly how they'll remember me, too!"

There was a short wait time at the Blue Dahlia Bistro, where we would be having lunch. With traffic, Harrison was about twenty minutes away, giving me an opportunity to inspect my surroundings: a lively café scene in front of East 11th Street. Diners at the restaurant had front row seats to traffic flowing to and from the city center. To the left, I saw everything familiar to me—the behemoth interstate bordering Austin's bustling downtown made up of increasingly taller and impressive architecture. To the right of me was something different—something from the Austin of old. Ceilings were a little closer to the ground, and the differences between neighboring homes and businesses chopped up the landscape into something heterogeneous, shifting, and unfamiliar (to me).

The mood at 12:30 was lively yet unhurried. People ate at conversational pace and continued leisurely to the adjacent establishments—a starkly constructed boutique

[1] Throughout the thesis I will refer to Harrison Eppright as "Harrison." When introducing himself in person, he offers his full name and business card. "I love to use my full name…with any document that I sign, I use my full name. I introduce myself to people as "Harrison Eppright."

thrift store and a small, elegantly decorated gallery of fashion accessories. By the time we went in—around 1:00, lunch customers were steadily leaving. In reviewing my audio recordings taken that day, Harrison's voice, as bright as it is, bobs above and below the ubiquitous watery surface of softer, distant conversation.

"You Epprights are not like the others"

"I consider myself very, very expressive…some even say a little bit theatrical…and I like that!" Harrison says with his usual smile. "I always loved cardigan sweaters," "And if I had my way as a child, I would have gone to school dressed in a shirt and a tie, wearing cardigans."

His mother, Lillian Eppright, had different ideas about his outfits and always got the final word in how young Harrison would present himself around his peers.

"She would say, 'no, the kids at school won't understand that…' and certainly the kids at the public school would *not* have understood that."

When Harrison looks back on his early life, he notes that many of the adults he grew up with (family, friends, and neighbors) put in a collective effort to minimize "the in-your-face Jim Crow" if of the mid-twentieth century. This is not to say that he didn't see it. His mother cleaned houses in "the white part of town" and would sometimes take Harrison along with her to work. On many Saturday afternoons his parents would "go for rides" around Austin, not for work, but simply for pleasure. Harrison recounts how he would check out the neighborhoods when with his parents:

> "You know, you saw how the streets were better looking, they were cleaner, they were more paved…the neighborhoods—bigger yards…It was easy to see that…We saw the differences."
>
> "So…so you saw those little things and you were—they couldn't help, even if your parents were trying to explain to you that you were *just* as good as…as anyone else, you still saw the *evidence* that you 'weren't as good'…" (Harrison Eppright [Tour Ambassador] in conversation with the author, February 2020)

His parents worked multiple jobs and saved up all the money they could to be able to afford their house in East Austin on Greenwood Avenue in 1961. For the previous five years his family had lived in the Booker T. Washington projects.[2] While Harrison was just a one-year-old when his family got to Booker T. in 1956, he remembers the treatment his parents received from the other black families in the building in the times leading up to their departure after five long years. According to Harrison, there was a divide between the behavior of his parents and the more common, promiscuous culture among the other adults there (categorized by Harrison as doing things such as "sleeping around" or "throwing yourself at women"). It made his family suffer from what he describes as "crabs in a barrel syndrome." The neighbors "egged" their front door one Halloween. Another time, he overheard his father and neighbor yelling at each other to "shut up" in the heat of some unknown altercation.

[2] As Harrison had explained to me, the Booker T. Washington housing projects were never intended to be permanent residences for the working-class minority residents that made up the bulk of the tenants. In theory, the government-subsidized housing was to act as a springboard towards finding a different home (as the Epprights successfully did after five years).

Figure 5: The Booker T. Washington Apartments still stand today as public housing. "Mom" cried tears of joy when they were finally able to move to Greenwood Avenue in 1961. Five-year-old Harrison was so excited that he threw up on his grandmother, who was holding him.

Credit: Wong, Patrick Y. *Pathways at Booker T. Washington Terraces*. Photograph. *Housing Authority of the City of Austin*. Austin. Accessed February 28, 2020. https://www.hacanet.org/location/booker-t-washington-terraces/.

In Harrison's, eyes, they were accused of "trying to be white". The insult that he took from this accusation was that his family was refuting their "blackness". In contrast, Lloyd C Kearley, the superintendent at Booker T. Washington, valued the Epprights' perceived responsibility and behavior as tenants. He noted their otherness when talking to Harrison's mother one day:

> "'You Epprights are not like the others. Y'all wanna go somewhere. These folks…here, this is the best they're gonna get…and you folks want to go somewhere.' And mom, to this day…she does not have a lot of

> good memories about the Booker T. Washington projects…we were there from 1955 to 1961." (Harrison Eppright)

The Eppright's new house on Greenwood Avenue had been sitting on the market for about a year before Harrison's parents bought it. Originally destined for a white neighborhood, the house's structure and lot were larger than many of the neighboring homes. However, when city development shifted in 1928 to designate a "negro district" to the east of downtown, the house on Greenwood Avenue essentially "got lumped in" with the neighboring houses that had black tenants. His parents had seized an opportunity to move the family into a comfortable home despite not having much of a "choice" in choosing their preferred area of town. Additionally, Austin's 1928 adoption of comprehensive zoning efforts (which comes before the introduction of the term "redlining") would only be strengthened by the influx of poor families moving into the city from rural areas during the Great Depression in search of food and work.

In a path of least resistance, those populations tended to move into the low-income housing of East Austin. This would further realize the vision laid out in the 1928 Master Plan, which was articulated to city commissioners by the Dallas-based Koch and Fowler Engineering Firm:

> There has been considerable talk in Austin, as well as other cities, in regard to the race segregation problem. This problem cannot be solved legally under any zoning law known to us at present. Practically all attempts of such have been proven unconstitutional…It is our recommendation that the nearest approach to the solution of the race segregation problem will be the recommendation of this district ["the area just east of East Avenue and south of the City Cemetery"] as a negro district; and that all the facilities and conveniences be provided the negroes in this district, as an incentive to draw the negro population to this area. (Koch & Fowler, 1928 p. 57)

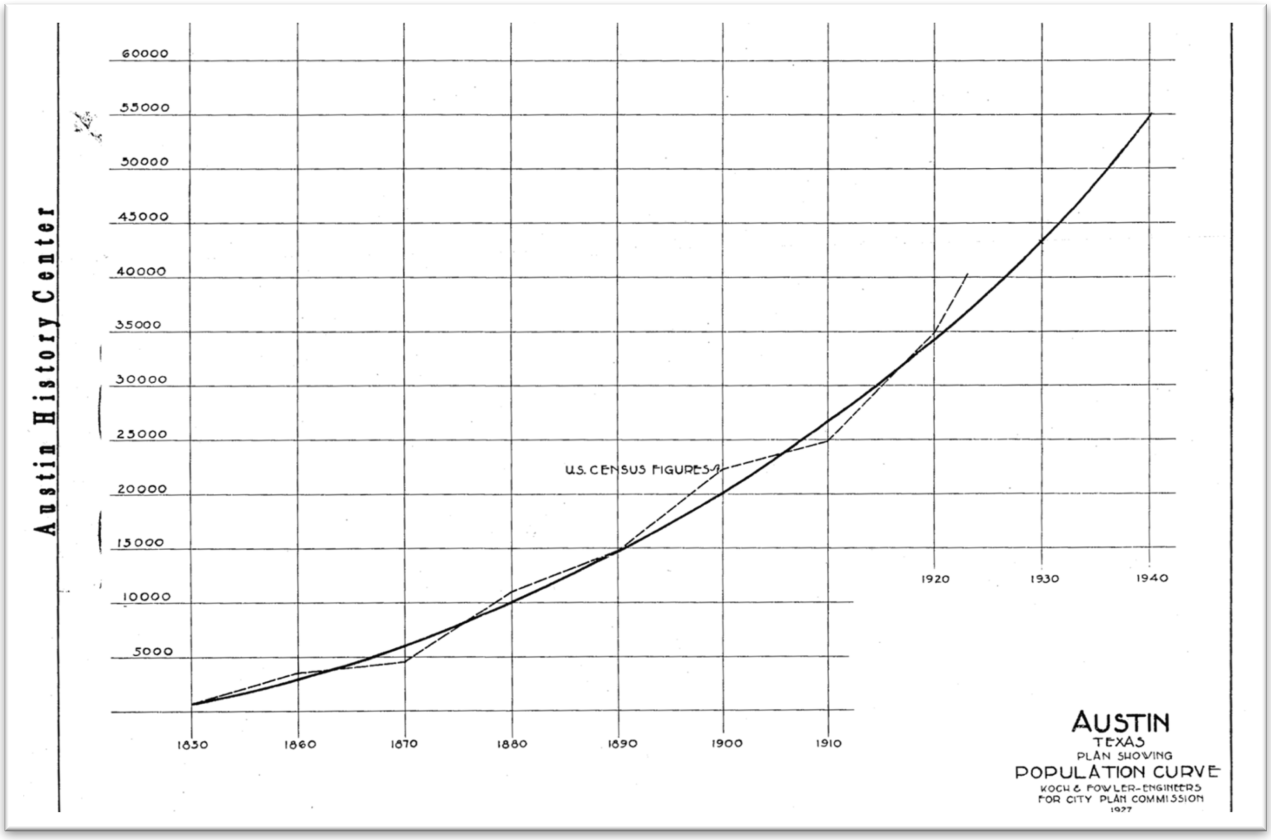

Figure 6: This plate depicting the rise of population figures was included in the 1957 reprint of the 1928 City of Austin Master Plan by Koch & Fowler Engineering Consultants. This accurately illustrates the slow growth of Austin between 1860 and 1870 that is followed by substantial expansion in subsequent decades. Their curve underestimates the surge of population beyond the 1920s. For example, city population data shows approximately 53,120 living in Austin by 1930. In our second conversation, Harrison remarks that this error was due to the Great Depression, which caused migration from rural areas to city centers and urban settings.

Credit: Koch and Fowler Consulting Engineers (1928). A City Plan for Austin, Texas (Report prepared for Austin City Planning Commission). ftp://ftp.austintexas.gov/GIS-Data/planning/compplan/1927_Plan.pdf (Retrieved August 22, 2019)

Segregationist ideologies were prevalent as Texas was one of the states that were reluctant to allow black people into the image and reputation of public life in the South. This sentiment translated into real action taken on behalf of the city to "find a legal means to zone racial apartheid" which, as Tretter (2012) points out, is symbolic of the

larger Southern Progressivist movement which took hold between 1890-1920:

> Woodward once again so astutely characterized it, were for "whites only." Instead of improving the situations of non-white people, the overwhelming results of Progressive reform in the South was implemented to improve the situation for 'whites,' largely at the expense of non-whites, and to solidify white domination over non-whites by legal means (Kirby 1972; Woodward 1974, as cited by Tretter 2012)

The Epprights were among the many who moved in to be near services and utilities that did business with black families. As Harrison told me:

> "[W]e *had* to live in East Austin…whether you were working class, or upper class, or you know, just, you know, the poorest of the poor. If you were black, you pretty much *had* to live on this side of town. And so there were…schools. There were businesses here…infrastructure here…" (Harrison Eppright)

Although money was tight, his mother and father both kept up with multiple jobs to meet their monthly mortgage bills. Had his parents missed a single payment, Harrison told me, their home would have been taken away from them.

Being only five years old at the time of moving to Greenwood means that many of his memories about life at in Booker T. Washington projects have been provided by stories from his parents and siblings. The visibility of the civil rights discourse became inevitable to Harrison as he spent his childhood and adolescence in East Austin. He remembers becoming more cognizant of the black social movements defining the 1960s through media.

> And also too…you know, black history…I'm glad that I came along at a time when the black consciousness movement started…that I came along at a time when…we started to see, through the courts…through social actions and civil disobedience, since I was born in fifty-five. You know, even though we were a Jim Crow city, a Jim Crow state, really a Jim Crow

> *country*, things were starting to change…. I mean, what I knew of black history when I went to Simms Elementary School from sixty-one to sixty-five, *pales* in comparison to how much more history that I realized after I went to an officially racially integrated school…Definitely when I got to John H. Reagan High School, there were more books in the library on…on black history, on black individuals." (Harrison Eppright)

From weekend TV programming to the books at the school library, Harrison faced increasing exposure to the Black Consciousness movement during his schooling years. The introduction of black history to Harrison in the sixties contributed to an interest that would become a lifelong passion.

> [It really stuck with me] that—the African-American history, and how that related to me as an East-Austinite, and seeing what was going on in communities since these biographies…these histories were about other communities. That spurred an interest…" (Harrison Eppright)

By the 1990s, Harrison had moved across town and further away from his old home on Greenwood Avenue. Although he maintained his relationship to East Austin through functions such as funerals, religious services, and family, Harrison began to miss the feeling of East Austin's sense of solidarity. People of different cultures would come together there; Harrison reflects on the times where he'd be walking home from church as a boy, taking in the sound of Mexican music playing outside from car radios.[3] Looking back on it now, he sees how he became nostalgic for the diverse sense community he experienced while growing up in East Austin.

[3] East Austin also has a thriving Mexican-American community going back as far as the partitioning of the "negro district." This is important to keep in mind as my project has a limited scope of East Austin's population that focuses primarily on its black residents. Many times Harrison would compare his family's living conditions favorably against "Mexican East Austin," which he told me had essentially half of the paved roads that the "negro district" had while growing up there.

> I was born here. My mother and my sister live here. The church that I worship at is here in East Austin. I'm glad that it has…it has shaped me. But *Austin* has shaped me. And I'm glad that I am working to recover the history and promote the history, and how the African-American history here is unique, but it's also unique in—it's also a part of Austin's history as well…to me, that's kind of a way of making up for the fact that I maybe did not appreciate it…when I was growing up…but also too, the acknowledgement…that painful reality that we were still regarded as second-class citizens in East Austin—whoever we were… (Harrison Eppright)

There was still more within the East Austin community to be explored that as a young man, he did not—or could not—access. As an adult, Harrison's passion for history and grew. While in his mid-thirties, he accepted a position at the Austin Bureau of Visitor Services (now called "Visit Austin"), which had within it a small department called "Heritage Marketing." He, along with his coworkers, were tasked with informing the public—tourists, visitors, residents—on Austin's rich cultural landmarks across multiple histories. The lead historian that provided walking tours at the time also gave lectures to the other Heritage Marketing employees. Harrison realized the wealth of stories and information available to him and took advantage of this opportunity to learn as much as possible. Even so, the sedentary, nine-to-five lifestyle of learning history from behind a desk was not Harrison's intention for the future. At first, searching for ways to "get out of the office" led him to giving the occasional walking tour in downtown Austin as a substitute guide. Simply put, Harrison did not want to just *tell* people where to go from behind a desk—he wanted to go out and *show* them himself.

> "It was a wonderful time to reconnect with East Austin in a *huge* way—a much larger and more in-depth way…and *returning*, and the fact that working in the Visitor Center in the nineties and in the first decade of this century, people were told 'don't go east of the interstate." (Harrison Eppright)

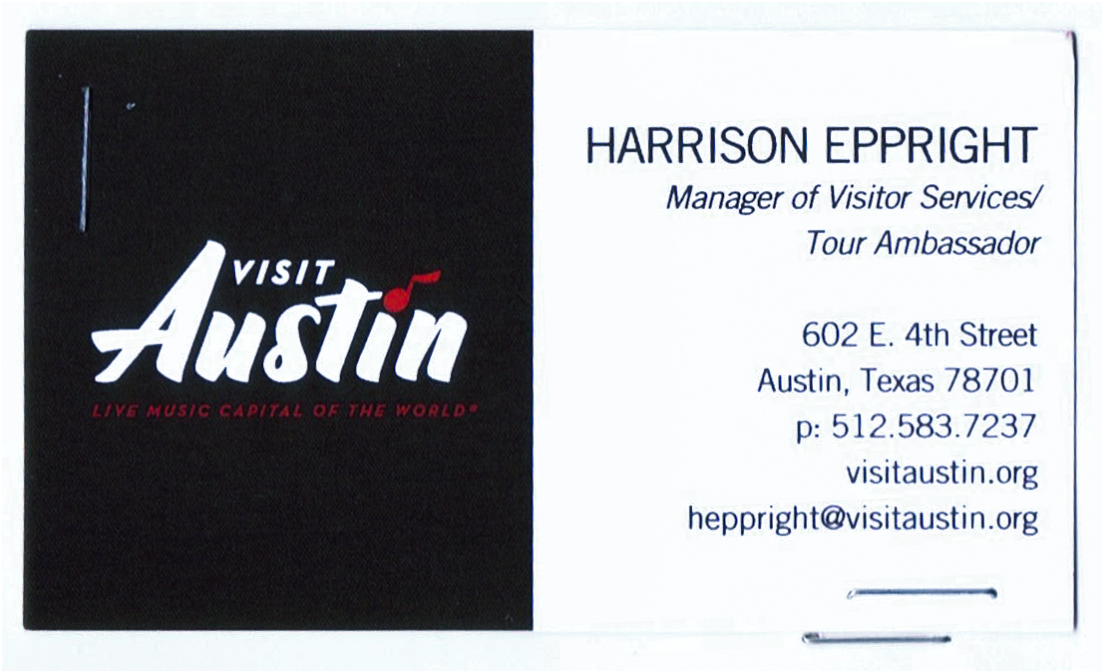

Figure 7: Harrison Eppright's business card.

I include this scanned image to draw attention to the ways that Harrison presents himself through material culture and the resulting effects on how others perceive him. Just like a meticulously fashioned outfit, the business card—with its large "Visit Austin" emblem printed on one half—presents identity claims of authority and social status. He carries several of these cards at a time in his wallet and hands them out readily, including two such occasions during our walk through East Austin in February.

Credit: Ryan Mata (2020)

Chapter 3
Urban Tours: Practice and Preparation

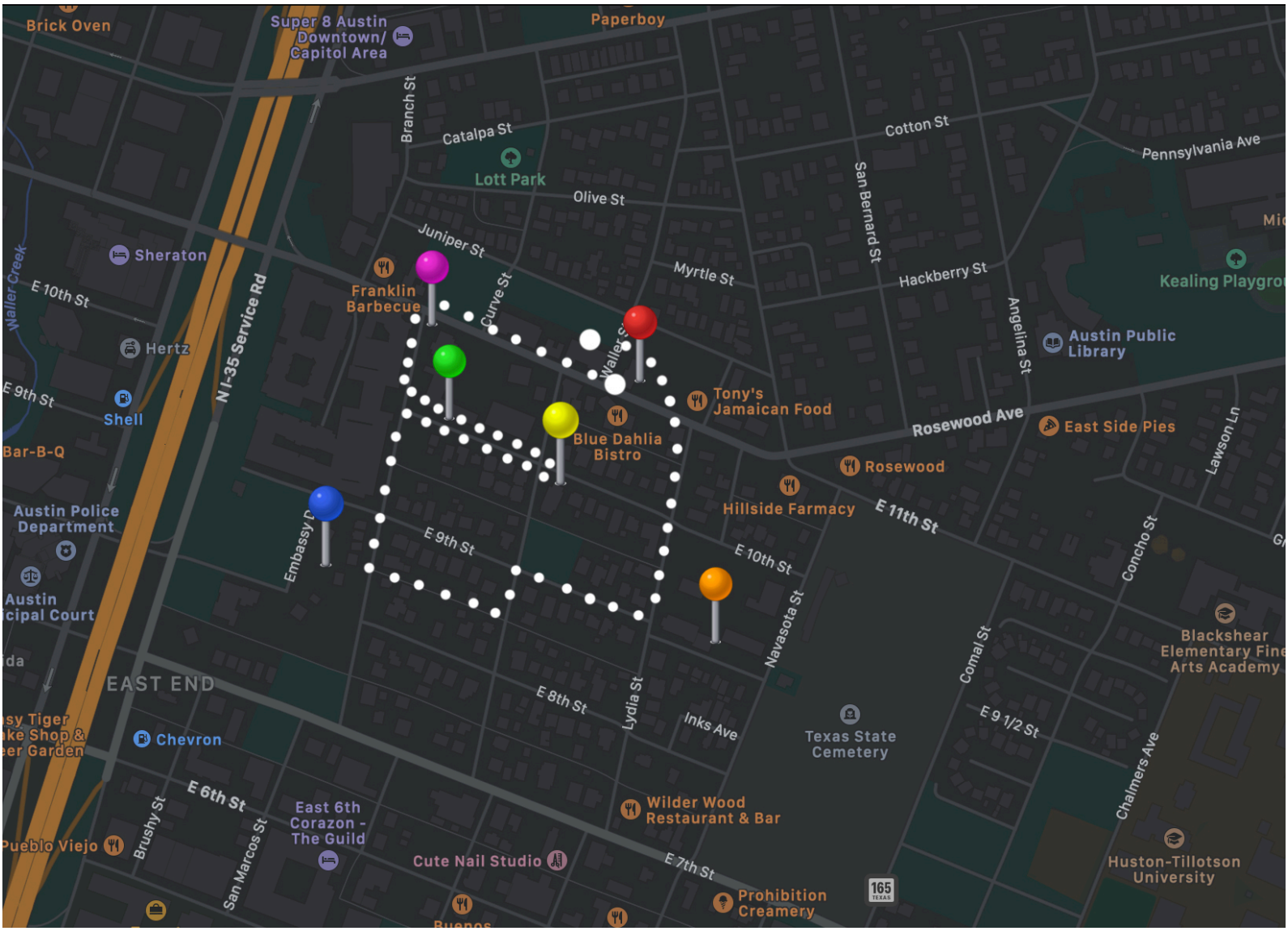

Figure 8: An overview of our walking tour in February 2020. We began traveling east towards Charles Urdy Plaza before making a large loop back to Victory Grill. Our tour overall lasted approximately 90 minutes following our lunch at Blue Dahlia Bistro, which had taken about one hour. The route did not follow a specific theme, but instead relied on the close proximity of the landmarks within "Black Downtown." The white dots represent our walking route, with the larger circles indicating our beginning and end points. The first walking tour that I took with Harrison, which was in 2019, took nearly double the amount of time that we used here. Granted, there were both more audience members and more tour stops (going as far east as the Texas State Cemetery)

Red: Victory Grill and Blue Dahlia Bistro

Magenta: Charles Urdy Plaza

Green: Ebenezer (Third) Baptist Church

Yellow: African Methodist Episcopal Church

Blue: The French Legation building (the oldest known structure in Austin, Texas)

Orange: Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church

Credit: Apple Maps, modified by Ryan Mata (2020)

Research on both sensory ethnography and walking tours has shaped how I collect and analyze data during my conversations and tours with Harrison. A prominent researcher involved in both of these topics is Sarah Pink, whose writings (2008 & 2009) inform how I observe and analyze the twists and turns our East Austin walking route. In *An Urban Tour: The sensory sociality of ethnographic place-making*, Pink tours multiple urban cities with locals serving as her guide. Later, the observations gathered from their narration and navigation of place are organized in Pink's discussion on the "sociality, sensoriality, and the imaginings" that have been "invited" by their visit to each location (Pink 2008). This process isn't done alone. Rather, the guide and the researcher work together to make sense of shared and unique imaginings (Pink 2008; Aoki & Yoshimizu 2015; Demerath & Levinger 2013). In other words, the researcher and participant are combining their thoughts, feelings, and personal meanings to create an overall "experience" of a particular location. This composite experience is neither that of the participant *nor* the researcher exclusively. This "sharing" even occurs on the physical level, where collaboration through walking becomes related in terms of movement and rhythm. Pink cites the importance of considering this as well:

> "Through shared walking, we can see and feel what is really a learning process of being together, in adjusting one's body and one's speech to the rhythms of others, and of sharing (or at least coming to see) a point of view." (Lee and Ingold 2006, as cited by Pink 2008, parentheses not mine)

While these points of contact are important to keep in mind during our shared walk, there are some degrees of difference in our movement that I must account for reflexively. This gets explored at greater length Sarah Pink's 2009 book *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. She concludes that I must account for my own "human perception" as well as the "political

and power relations from which ethnographic research is inextricable." (20). On one hand, Harrison's visibility in East Austin carries different performative and political implications that are native to his own intersectionality (Hartal 2016). For someone with Harrison's job, repetition builds footprints left along the routes he walks—over and over—leading to the development of Harrison's discursive "footprint" on East Austin. Such a buildup has the potential to grow knowledge as well. "In walking more and more streets, participants' knowledge of places expands." (Richardson 2005). My research, on the other hand, participates within this discourse *by invitation* (Pink 2008), getting stirred up in collaboration with that of Harrison's. Additionally, my own subjectivity provides particular "social entanglements" that "coimplicate" me in place-making process (Aoki & Yoshimizu 2015) This mixture "reconstitutes" (Pink 2008) here as an ethnographic reproduction of that which Harrison and I make out of our entangled, "embodied and imaginative practices." New patches of information learned and recovered by Harrison get stitched into updated iterations of his stories. Each subsequent audience of Harrison's work both builds atop and benefits from a foundation of past collective imaginings. New audiences introduce the latest layers of complexity and meaning, which Harrison believes can be brought by any and all participants. "We are each complicated, layered individuals," he tells me.

It seems that Harrison is constantly learning from the salvaged memories garnered over years of telling and retelling histories. Within this also lies the possibility of making new discoveries with each step. Preserving history, when done as a shared practice, may

also recover previously unnoted parts of history or personal memories that have gone long un-triggered:

> "The eyes are like cameras…the eyes are like cameras, so you…it's a lot of stuff you notice, and you go back and maybe you see something that you didn't see earlier…you record all that stuff, but it's back in your mind somewhere…and sometimes you'll think about it when you're alone…or something that somebody will say will trigger it, or, even in my case, even of doing so much research… it's triggered these memories."
> (Harrison Eppright)

Julia Aoki and Akaya Yoshimizu (2015) note the potential for "ethnographic entanglement" to become "as much if not more about encountering historical absences than identifying historical remains…" However, their research emphasizes the limitations of negotiating with the ways in which the researcher is "constrained by lifeworld entanglements and institutionalized practices of research and knowledge production, which are implicated in the production and reproduction of transhistorical inclusions and cohesions." (Aoki & Yoshimizu 2015).

How else can walking tour participants steer these ethnographic place-making methodologies? Research into spatial practices explore and categorize certain ways that people like Harrison (the tour guide) and I (the ethnographer) make use of space. Nathalie Raulet-Croset and Anni Borzeix (2014) present a dimensional analysis of "commentated walks" that help provide a framework for understanding "dealing with space." Their article describes three key components of commentated walks— "walking with," "talking with," and "being with". In addition to being "interrelated activities," *walking*, *talking,* and *being* can also provide means for shared experience between the researcher and interlocutor (Raulet-Croset and Borzeix 2014). This proposition works in

tandem with Sarah Pink's research (2008) into ethnographic place-making as methods for qualitative analysis in collaborative settings such as commentated walks, urban tours, and in the context of this research, which is a combination of the two.

"Walking with" and among space allows for the one's surroundings to influence shared experience. Demerath and Levinger (2013) emphasize the importance of being on foot as "vehicles of culture," going so far as to categorize this "mode" of spatial interaction as an essential part of "generating new meanings" while creating a "mutual ordering" of one's surroundings. During our walking tour, Harrison's physical navigation of space and attention to particular detail becomes entangled with his narrative description of scenes and tour stops (i.e. "talking with"; Raulet-Croset and Borzeix 2014). "Space is a resource for which it is possible to speak about, but it is also a resource which stimulates impressions and feelings that would never have been mentioned in a classic interview situation." (Raulet-Croset and Borzeix 2014).

The category of "being with," (including Sarah Pink's "collective imaginings") is in turn influenced by both space and speech (in this case meaning walking and talking). Tanya Richardson (2005), who examined place-making practices in walking tours of Odessa, Ukraine emphasizes the influence of dialogue over experience. The exchange between guide and audience has been shaped by their physical and symbolic locations while at the same time participates in "making and mediating the experience of place." (Richardson 2005).

These spatial practices, although presented as ethnographic methodologies, are just as applicable to Harrison's profession. That is to say, the tools of the ethnographer can also be appropriated as tools of the tour guide.

> …walking through parts of East Austin and explaining East Austin and showing some of the landmarks, and yes, looking at the landmarks *does* affect the…talking that I do. And it does, of course, bring up some memories, or the anecdotes that I can share with people--at least anecdotes of some of the participants [of the walking tours] behind these landmarks…and [in regards to this process] then affecting the "being", yes—being a tour guide for East Austin, in fact being a tour guide *through* East Austin…there is an aspect of making a political statement…and it is also showing people too that there is still—even with gentrification—and the fact that so many African-Americans have moved out of East Austin…my visibility is showing that there is still a presence there—not just in the past, but also in the present, and that history continues to be made, and these landmarks are not just landmarks of the past…(Harrison Eppright)

When attempting to superimpose his own walking tour methodology over the schema of "walking with," "talking with," and "being with," Harrison begins by describing the evocative effects of touring nearby landmarks. Not only is the spatial practice of navigating East Austin affecting the resulting "talk" of the tour, but also Harrison's audience members—whether passively or actively—take part in influencing the construction of shared imaginings.

> Sometimes it *is* conversation. Somebody might say something, and it just—ah, ZING! —I've just remembered something. Sometimes that happens…somebody will say something and they unknowingly—*unknowingly*—they will say something…and a little bit of memory comes back. (Harrison Eppright)

We see here that walking, talking, and being are integral aspects of not only the ethnographic place-making process, but of the tour guiding process as well. Harrison's

understanding of how these relate to him comes out in his conversations with me about memories of his tours over the years. This background of knowledge meant that in our conversations, Harrison and I were well equipped to seek an understanding of each other's personal experience of being in East Austin.

Crafting tours

During one of our conversations Harrison and I were discussing what he considered to be *the* essential, "must-see" sites in Austin. "It's hard to think about what I would tell somebody if they only had a few hours to be here," I reflected.

This question is quite common to Harrison while on shift at the Austin Visitor Center, although the answer is never simple. "Well, what are you into?" he asks the imaginary tourist sitting across the table. Are you into music, are you into museums, are you into nature?

Harrison tailors tour routes and narrations for his audiences in real time, reacting to the people, space, and conversations that arise. When Harrison chooses specific sites to visit or walks one down a particular street between stops, he is molding the walking tour experience to share certain curated histories with his audience. This improvisation of narration accommodates participants of all ages and backgrounds.

> I rarely script what I say—and I should write out an outline, but I just do [it] extemporaneously, or I use notes…When I find something new, add something new…if I encounter something new…and also it brings back memory. This is one of the great things that I love about the life I have right now. It [has] caused me to go back and rethink some things. It's been a way of recovering memory—for me.

> I gauge the age-group of the participants…What kind of a group is it? Is it a family group…or is it a group of professionals? What kind of professionals? How long do they want the tour to be…What are their interests?
>
> …But then also too, there are things that I would like them to see as well, and this goes especially for those who think that the African-American presence in East Austin is gone.

As noted by Aoki and Yoshimizu in the context of their research in Yokohama and Vancouver (2015), tour guides, especially those who create their own scripts and prepare their own notes like Harrison (albeit sometimes scripted "on the spot"), engage in "actively challenging or disarticulating dominant understandings of place, both through oppositional narrative strategies and articulating those histories to present politics of space production." (278) Offering a "redemptive history" requires commentary that critiques the "direct present" in such a way that "activates memories and histories that have been actively erased in preparation for future development." (Aoki & Yoshimizu 2015). In the context of East Austin, Harrison does just this—with hopes in mind that he will both challenge modern misconceptions of East Austin while at the same time maintaining the prospect of a future for Austin's black cultural heritage community.

Pausability – Figures 9, 10, and 11

Loren Demerath and David Levinger (2013) examine navigation by foot as a "production of culture" and a key "facilitator of interaction." The term "pausability," meaning the ability to pause, is introduced in their theoretical analysis when emphasizing the ease at which a pedestrian can stop to gaze at something that catches their eye. As an audience on foot, one is not bound to the flow of cars on the street and can afford stopping to "take in" some places more than others. This variable too can be shaped by a tour guide.

In the first two pictures, a couple arrives at the Victory Grill via pedi-cab tour. They pause at the corner of the restaurant so that the driver/tour guide can turn to them while telling them about its intriguing history. Shortly after they left, another group of tourists were led by a guide—this time by foot—to the same exact spot as the couple before. The final image captures a moment of expression from their guide, Javier who pauses his tour by turning around to face the audience with the Victory Grill behind him.

Both guides are in control of the physical navigation of the audiences—with the pedi-cab driver literally steering the first couple and Javier creating a physical barrier which cuts off the other pedestrians. Later in our tour, Harrison does this inevitably with each "stop" that we make. By doing so, Harrison and the other guides are creating moments "that [allow] people to fulfill the potential of their interactions with each other or with their environment." (Demerath & Levinger 2013).


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NCUJB

Figures 12 and 13: *This is by John Yancey, who is an art professor at the University of Texas…and this just shows…what the neighborhood was like—what the neighborhood is noted for, you know, and how…you still have aspects of that in the neighborhood. The music scene [he points to the saxophones and horns], of course Victory Grill, and there were other music clubs along here [pointing to East Eleventh Street] …there was Charlie's Playhouse for many many years…that was along here too. The churches [shown] here are still in the community—Ebenezer and Metropolitan [African Methodist Episcopal Church] …* (Harrison Eppright while on tour)

Credit: Ryan Mata (2020)

Figure 14: A wider shot of the right half of Yancey's Mosaic. The piece shows more vignettes of "Black Downtown" on the opposite side.

Credit: Ryan Mata (2020)

Walking through Black Downtown and Beyond

This is what they used to call 'Black Downtown', between East 11th and East 12th streets. East 11th was…businesses, let's see…clubs, restaurants…illicit activities."

> "…while working at the Visitor Center—and we were on East Second Street at the time—that people would ask, "Oh, I've heard that you—that you don't go east of the interstate. Is that true?" And so…folks behind the counter would say, "No, no, no—don't go east of the interstate. Stay on this side…stay on the west side of the interstate." And so I started interrupting folks, I started intervening and saying, "No, I grew up on the east side of town. It is no worse than any other part of the city. There are things to see on the east side of town, yes…I had to tell people that there were drugs on the west side of town as well." (Harrison Eppright [Tour Ambassador] in conversation with the author, February 2020)

It was noticeable to me that Harrison works to refute elements of the current discourse of East Austin (such as its unsuitability for visitors). In lieu of these (mis)conceptions, a new narrative is introduced to spaces such as Charles Urdy Plaza. This new assignment of meaning is first made intimate through commentary from Harrison on his personal knowledge of Charles Urdy (see Figure 13). From this beginning segment of our walking tour, Harrison's storytelling practices draw connections from the remembered past to through to the "direct present and imagined future." (Aoki & Yoshimizu 2015). Consider these comments on East Austin offered by Harrison while at the plaza:

> *…and this just shows…what the neighborhood was like—what the neighborhood is noted for, you know, and how…you still have aspects of that in the neighborhood…*
>
> *"…the churches here are still in the community—Ebenezer and Metropolitan (African Methodist Episcopal Church] …*
>
> *"…people would ask, "Oh, I've heard that you—that you don't go east of the interstate. Is that true?" And so…folks behind the counter would say, "No, no, no—don't go east of the interstate. Stay on this side…stay on the west side of the interstate." And so I started interrupting folks, I started intervening and saying, "No, I grew up on the east side of town. It is no worse than any other part of the city. There are things to see on the east side of town, yes…I had to tell people that there were drugs on the west side of town as well."*

"Anyway, this mural is going to be restored because it's…been about twenty years…it's showing its age, so it's going to be restored."

In the arrangement of comments made by Harrison above, one can notice a progression that begins with an accessing of the past that moves forward through temporalities. This instantiates a key idea underscored by Richardson (2005) that "different temporalities co-exist in a place-making practice…moving "back and forth across time imaginatively." (22) Harrison resynthesizes fragments of history from past to present that to create an experience both "sensed" and "shared" across time and audiences (Pink 2008; Richardson 2005).

It is at this moment too that Harrison begins with the process of "challenging" and "disarticulating dominant understandings of place." (Aoki & Yoshimizu 2015). To tourists wondering about attractions in the Visitor Center, the alternative view of East Austin offered by Harrison "became a dialogic process where meanings were open and gaps in knowledge tangible." (Richardson 2005). These "gaps" are opened through the introduction of his lived experiences at the Visitor Center—which also serve as evidence that Harrison has been working for years to confront the pervasive, "abstract historical narratives" surrounding the east side of town. As someone who grew up in East Austin, Harrison can offer his audience a collection of "sensually experienced deviations" (Aoki & Yoshimizu 2015) that either work alongside or as a critique of presiding knowledge of the community.

Harrison tells his stories in stride, stopping at a distance from his target. Then, an incremental encroachment begins—sometimes to get a better look, other times as a

method of zeroing in on a side story. The dialogue, however tangential it seems to get, is in such detail that designating a single thread of narration as "dominant" was impossible to me. At Urdy Plaza, Harrison meticulously swept through the mosaic with narration—almost as if he had studied each individual shard of stained glass and ceramic. Yancey's art is a beautiful representation of the community in harmony. In need of restoration? Perhaps, but more obviously so to one who has been around to see it fade. As a long-time walking tour guide, Harrison has seen just that.

Ebenezer (Third) Baptist Church

Figure 15: The original name was Third Baptist Church – Colored. Pictured here is the stone tabernacle on a dark and rainy day. The bell from the original Gothic structure remains atop the building.

Credit: Ryan Mata (2020)

Figure 16: A snapshot of the neon sign situated on the corner of East 10th and San Marcos Street. Our overcast weather conditions that day lend a wash of grey across the frame—making for an unusually subdued representation of the sign.

Credit: Ryan Mata (2020)

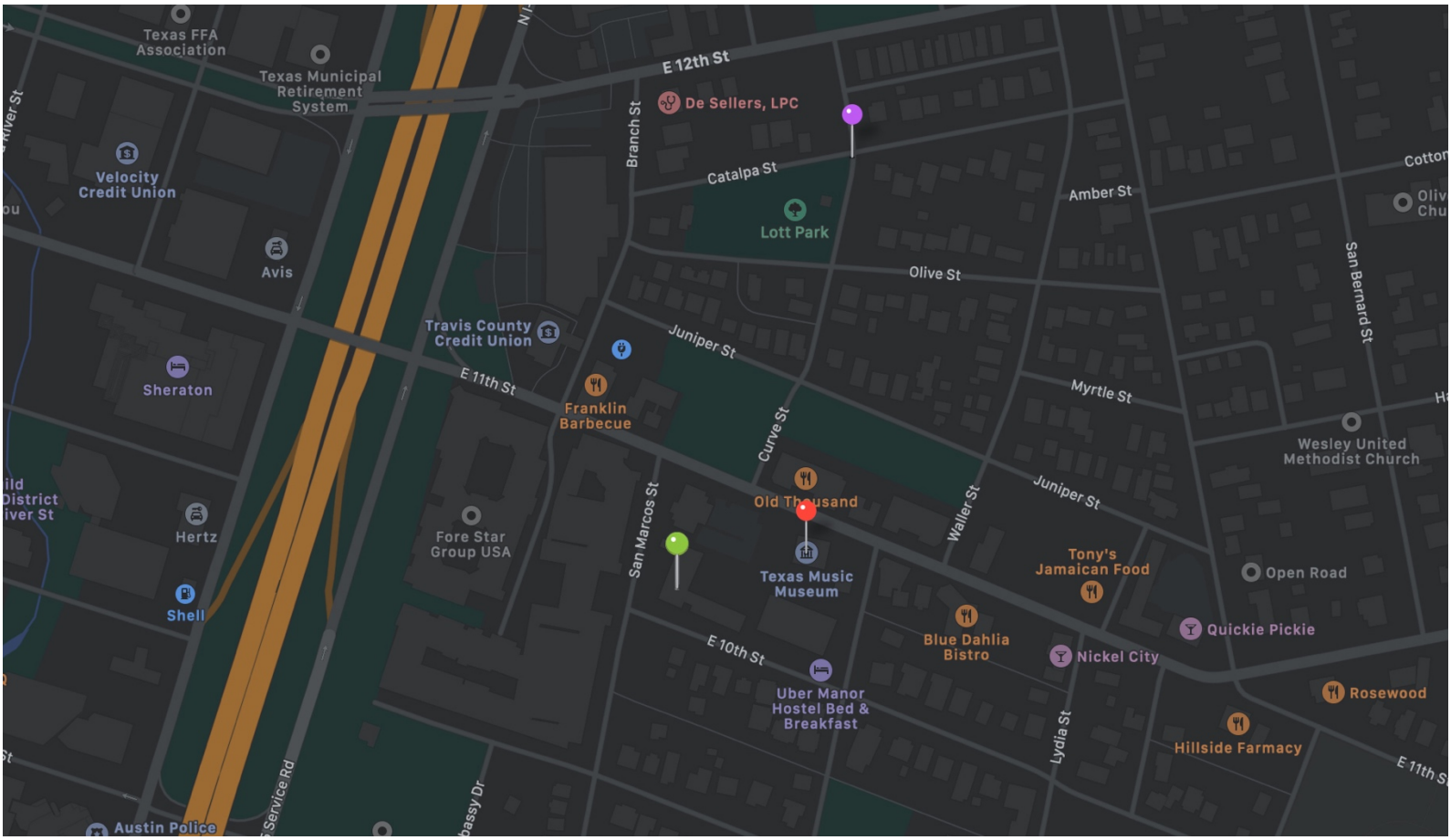
Texas FFA Association
Texas Municipal Retirement System
E 12th St
De Sellers, LPC
Branch St
Catalpa St
Amber St
Velocity Credit Union
Lott Park
Avis
Olive St
San Bernard St
Travis County Credit Union
Juniper St
Sheraton
E 11th St
Franklin Barbecue
Myrtle St
Curve St
Wesley United Methodist Church
Old Thousand
Waller St
Juniper St
Hertz
Fore Star Group USA
San Marcos St
Texas Music Museum
Tony's Jamaican Food
Open Road
Shell
Blue Dahlia Bistro
Quickie Pickie
E 10th St
Nickel City
Uber Manor Hostel Bed & Breakfast
Rosewood
Lydia St
Hillside Farmacy
Austin Police

Figure 17: *If you belonged to Ebenezer—and I guess it still is to a degree—you…you know it's a sign of social status to be at Ebenezer…We used to have churches on what seemed like every corner, there were so many."* (Harrison Eppright)

Purple: Ebenezer (Third) Baptist Church's approximate original location at Catalpa and Curve 1875-1885.

Green: Ebenezer (Third) Baptist Church's location since 1885

Red: The Marvin C. Griffin Building, which currently is the Texas Music Museum. It stands within the complex of Ebenezer's various properties, which were acquired mostly by the former Ebenezer Reverend Marvin C. Griffin.

Credit: Apple Maps, modified by Ryan Mata (2020)

Figure 18: The front of Ebenezer Baptist Church. The original congregation gathered long before the erection of this tabernacle. "Usually in the morning a woman would start singing, and then others would chime in, to sing. That was about 1875." (Harrison Eppright)

Credit: Ryan Mata (2020)

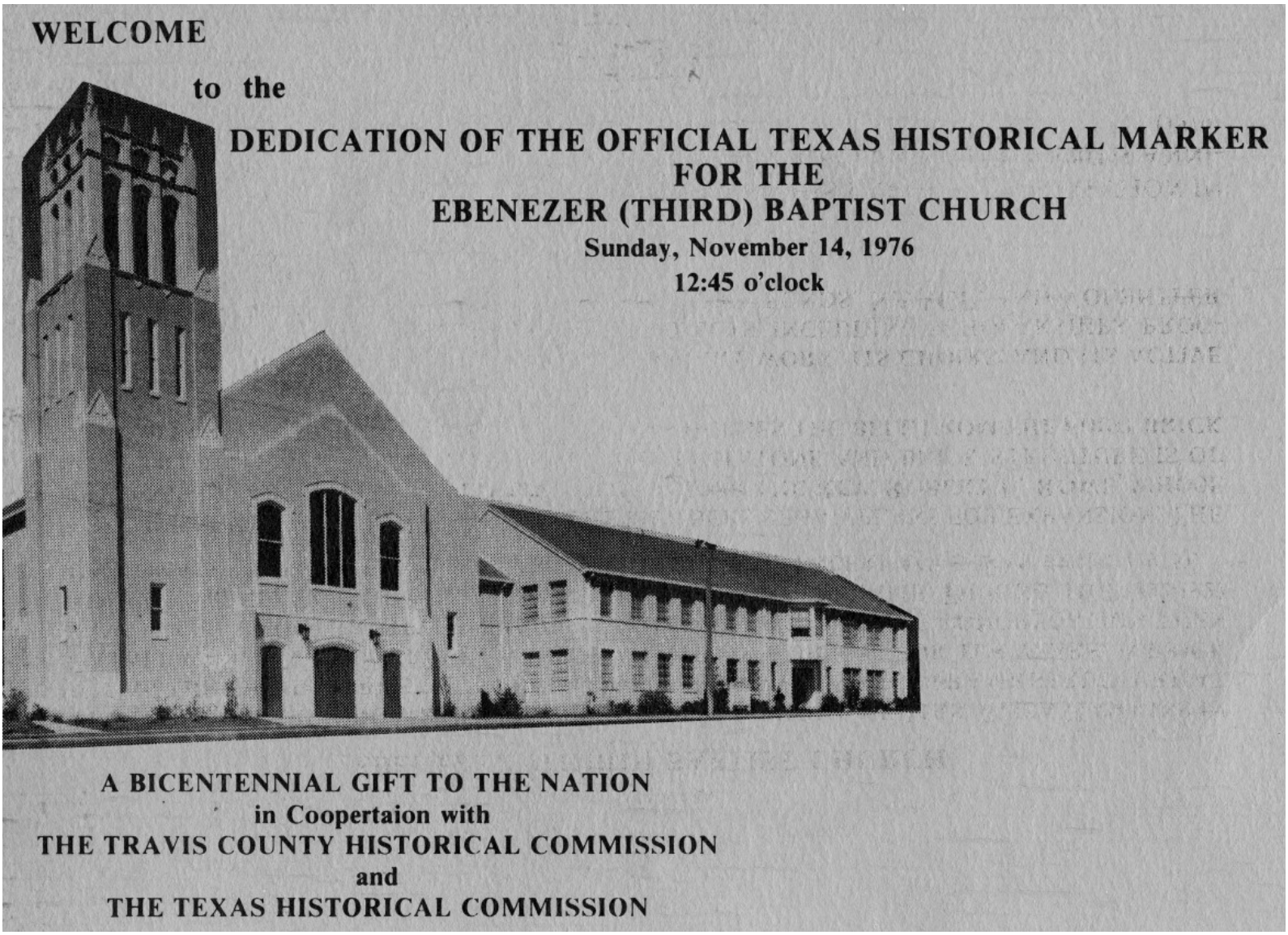

Figure 19: A program for the celebration of Ebenezer (Third) Baptist Church as an official Texas historical marker.

Credit: Ebenezer Baptist Church - Historic Marker, letter, November 14, 1976; (https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth17375/: accessed March 15, 2020), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, https://texashistory.unt.edu; crediting Jacob Fontaine Religious Museum.

> And so a Gothic-style church was completed in 1885, and that's when the congregation adapted the name 'Ebenezer'…
>
> …I like its Gothic appearance…yeah. Well, as a little boy I certainly wanted to see what this church was like inside, but uh…I didn't get the chance until I became an adult…I love the color of the brick…Well this church has been involved in the community for generations, and I came to the 140th anniversary service for this church, and that was back in 2015. This is all part of Ebenezer…Sunday school, education, yes… (Harrison Eppright [Tour Ambassador] in conversation with the author, February 2020)

Harrison's connection with Ebenezer (Third) Baptist Church goes back to when he admired it as a young boy. Harrison would often imagine the chandeliers that hung from the ceilings inside. Forty-five years ago he walked into the church for the very first time—around the same time that the church celebrated it's one-hundredth anniversary as a newly inducted historical marker.

In our inspection of the grounds at the Ebenezer, we walked around the two sides facing the sidewalk, stopping in front of two heavy wooden doors facing E 10th Street. While an historical site placard with a description of the church was installed beside the doors, Harrison stuck to his usual techniques of improvisation from the vast index of knowledge and personal experience he's accrued. Ebenezer itself has existed in multiple locations within East Austin—going back to its original structure near the intersection of Catalpa Street and Curve Street. Harrison highlights the fact that Ebenezer's long-standing presence predates a key and often cited artifact of East Austin history—the 1928 "Master Plan" for the city that partitioned the so-called "negro district."

> …And of course evidence that there has always been a black presence in East Austin, predating the Master Plan of 1928." (Harrison Eppright [Tour Ambassador] in conversation with the author, February 2020)

By noting that Ebenezer (Third) Baptist Church is older than the 1928 Master Plan, Harrison subverts a "dominant understanding" of the black population in Austin (Aoki & Yoshimizu 2015). He points this out to essentially say, "we were in East Austin long before city commissioners effectively categorized our neighborhoods as the "negro district." By offering this reminder, Harrison makes visible the history and agency of East Austin's early residents to create a communal space for themselves.

Built with Black Labor – Huston-Tillotson University

Figure 20: A handwritten caption on the back of this gelatin silver table card photograph reads "Allen Hall, Erected 1880-1881. Demolished 1966." Allen Hall was an original building of the Tillotson Institute. The future Huston-Tillotson College would be relocated to the old grounds of the Tillotson Institute after the merger years later in 1952.

Credit: Hill, S. B. [Allen Hall, Tillotson Institute], photograph, [1880-1901]; (https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth703942/m1/2/?q=Tillotson: accessed March 9, 2020), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, https://texashistory.unt.edu; crediting Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.

Few landmarks in East Austin have been around as long as Huston-Tillotson University. Made up from two schools—Tillotson College (formerly the Tillotson Institute or Tillotson Collegiate and Normal Institute) and Samuel Huston College—this institution of learning has roots in the black community of East Austin dating back to the late nineteenth century (Robinson 2010). The dual presence of the colleges tracked with the two-fold model of education being marketed towards African-Americans during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

> Yes, at a time where you had these two arguments—these two schools of thought about how best to educate black people…Shall we go with an industrial education? And the main proponent of that was Booker T. Washington. Or shall we go with a liberal arts education? W.E.B. Dubois was the main proponent of *that*. And so you had this clash, and Tillotson had a little bit of both [liberal arts/industrial]. Samuel Huston was more into the liberal arts, but Tillotson was a combination. And so this building was built in part with black labor, the bricks, yeah, done by black students—and it's one of only a handful of such buildings left in America, on black campuses, built with black labor... (Harrison Eppright [Tour Ambassador] in discussion with the author, February 2020)

These different schools (led by different schools of thought) merged in 1952 to become "Huston-Tillotson College" (Robinson 2010). Similar to Ebenezer (Third) Baptist Church, the school—now an accredited university (Robinson 2010)—lives on in Austin as a reminder of the long-standing black presence on the east side. Their history is embedded within the very bricks of Huston-Tillotson's original buildings. Like he had done previously, Harrison made sure to engage with both the university's "direct present" and imagined future" (Aoki & Yoshimizu 2015):

> It's talking about its uniqueness in the community as well—not only the community of East Austin but of Austin itself. It has an international student body. There's really a lot of things going on now. And it's a pretty school, too. (Harrison Eppright)

I feel compelled to include Huston-Tillotson because of its historical significance to East Austin. Even the earliest iterations of Ebenezer (Third) Baptist Church, as Harrison told me, existed "within the shadows of the old…campus." Not only has it played an important part in educating young black men and women in the past, but its bright future and growing student body ensures that the school will remain visible in Austin. Harrison is sure to include dialogue about Huston-Tillotson's current activity as being an auspicious sign for enduring participation within in the community. To the audience, this "heightens our awareness of what the space is and can be." (Demerath & Levinger 2013). It also shows examples of how Harrison's walking tours function on political and performative levels that draw from much more than the materiality of a place. By this I mean that Harrison does not simply "show what is there." Instead, he pulls together fragments of meaning from the space throughout its history to present an image that also takes into account that which may no longer exist physically, or to observe for oneself.

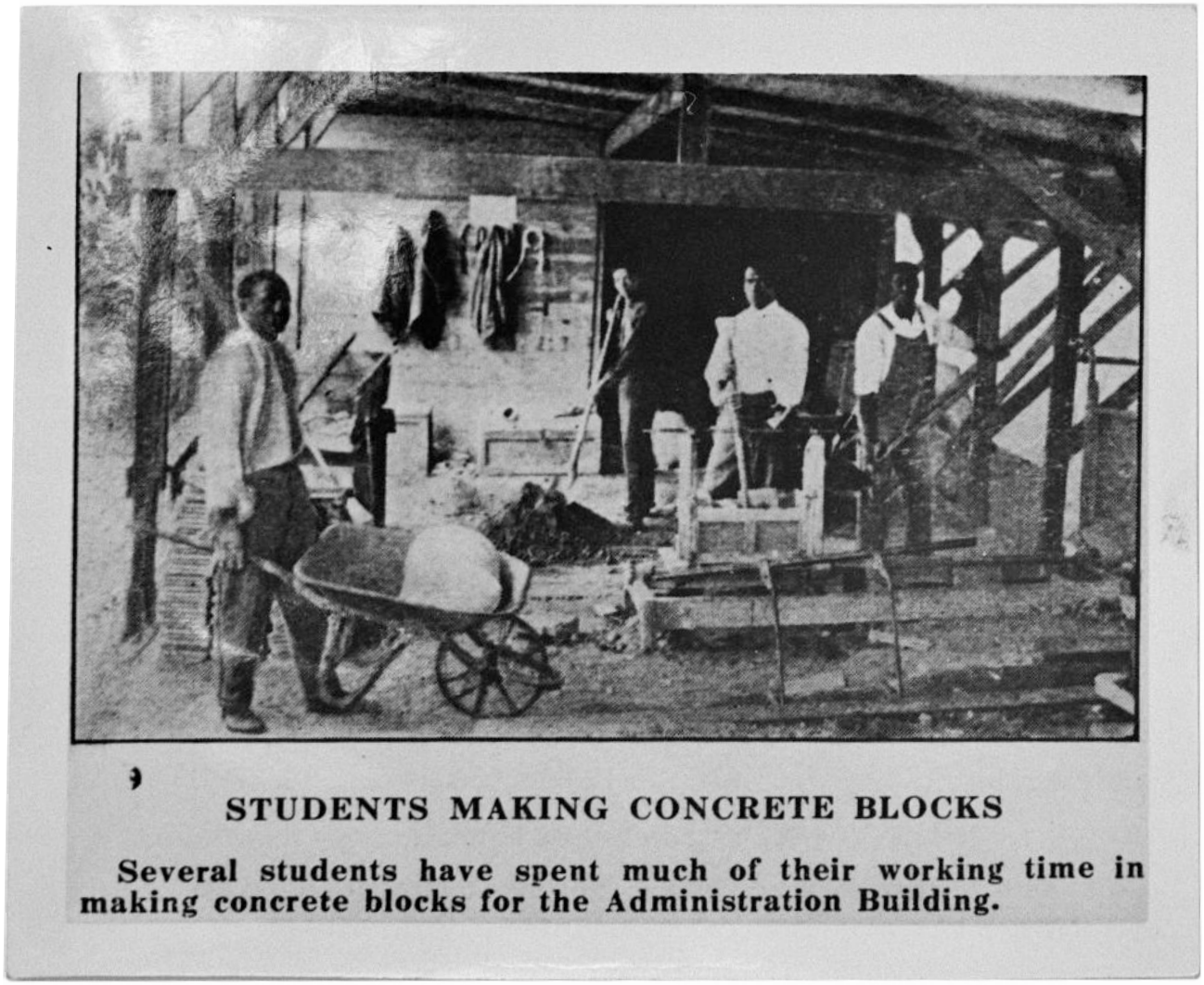

Figure 21: Students at the Tillotson Institute fabricating bricks for their future buildings on campus.

Credit: Texas Historical Commission. [Evans Industrial Building, Huston-Tillotson College], photograph, Date Unknown; (https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth672421/: accessed March 20, 2020), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, https://texashistory.unt.edu; crediting Texas Historical Commission.

Chapter 4
Shelter in Place

Figure 22: An N95 respirator mask made by 3M, which has been made a symbol of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Supply shortages have prompted unprecedented demand for things like this—things that I would usually pass by while grocery shopping. The current circumstances have called for many to rethink their navigation of everyday life.

Credit: Ryan Mata (2020)

> *"It is with great pride, joy & passion that we serve the Austin and San Marcos communities. That being said, we've made the heart wrenching decision to temporarily close. The health of our fellow Austinites and San Martians comes first & we hope to see y'all healthy & hopeful on the other side. Thank you for your support & for being understanding during this trying time."* (quote from the Blue Dahlia Bistro website, https://bluedahliabistro.com/)

Blue Dahlia Bistro on East 11th Street, where I had met with Harrison at the beginning of this project, has long since been closed to diners after the unprecedented spread of a novel virus known commonly as "coronavirus" or "COVID-19". As the weeks went on, growing numbers of ill and deceased patients prompted action from officials down to the local level. Residents, especially those over the age of 60 and with pre-existing health conditions, are urged to remain inside while those who must leave for "essential errands" must wear masks fashioned out of scarves, spare cloth, or whatever people can fasten around their nose and mouth. Harrison, who is 65 and takes these guidelines as seriously as we all do, has remained indoors as much as possible, communicating with the Visitor Center and I by phone.

To have a thesis on walking tours be interrupted by a pandemic and its consequential "stay-at-home" and "shelter-in-place" orders is unexpected. Although I could still communicate with Harrison about my progress on this project, a key element of our spatial navigation, walking, was now missing from my repertoire of usable methodologies. This is an impediment to Harrison's personal place-making strategies too, prompting new directions in the production of knowledge about East Austin. In a less important sense, it kept Harrison and I from taking more walks outdoors—but on the flip side created new pathways in this project that are opportune for reflection.

I only had to look back in my thesis to find inspiration from Harrison's personal life about "dealing with space" during times such as these. Just like when Harrison moved out of East Austin for the first time, his connection to the city—especially in the physical sense—was inhibited in such a way that he had to search for routes to engage the discourse of East Austin. By the 1990s he was able to do so through systematically through his employment at the Visitor Center. Having found a renewed interest in the city's history, Harrison slowly entered into a new realm of possibilities—one where spatial practices can be combined with narration to posit alternate histories, be they previously forgotten, erased, or unused.

In the context of the current "COVID-19" pandemic, we are similarly moved into a position to seek new ways of sharing local histories. Harrison and I were able to continue this process by telephone call—which provided access to the "talking" praxis of ethnographic walking tours (Raulet-Croset and Borzeix 2014). The current challenge of social distancing raises the question of whether or not we can still create new experiences of place from "shared imaginings" (Pink 2008) and "being with" (Raulet-Croset and Borzeix 2014) one another—even if only through a cellphone or video call.

In this thesis, for example, Harrison Eppright and I have collaborated to provide a more remotely-sensed collection of "shared imaginings" through the presentation of narration, archive, and images—both past and present. It is with renewed urgency in light of recent circumstances that future directions in this research address the limitations of physical access to space as fundamental to spatial practices and storytelling.

Conclusion

Just like building schools from student-built bricks, I think of Harrison's "walking" as a tangible experience of black labor. It is something that Harrison experiences physically and symbolically as he moves through his community. It is through his practices of storytelling that I have been able to participate through in the collaboration of a shared experience (Pink 2008). One valuable benefit of creating "shared meanings" while on foot is that they "cause us to feel trust and a sense of community." (Demerath & Levinger 2013). The walking tour format, which I have studied along the lines of "walking," "talking," and "being," (Aoki & Yoshimizu 2015) manipulates abstract, diffuse histories by calling them into the present moment. When done so in the context of East Austin, Harrison critically evaluates these "abstract histories" against a commentary of lived experience and oral history. We see that walking tours do not only function as a physical act but also as a political act that makes visible the vast potential of underrepresented histories that exist outside dominant local discourses of "public knowledge" about East Austin.

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